

today yet. First of all, I want to talk about the appropriations bill that we passed for VA and HUD last week. While I submitted a statement for the RECORD, since we were in a rush and squeezed for time, I didn't have a chance to talk about FEMA and in particular the Director, James Lee Witt. I feel bad about that. I want to talk about FEMA, and I want to talk about Mr. Witt today on the floor because this small agency with a very big heart has made a huge difference to a lot of our States—to a lot of people in our States. As we go to conference, I hope the conferees will remember the very big job I think FEMA does and will honor the level of funding requested by the President in the President's budget.

My contact with James Lee Witt—I want to talk about him, and then I want to talk about FEMA. It is about more than one person. It goes back to 1993. The Chair today, from Kansas, of course, knows agriculture as well as anyone and knows what happens when you are faced with record flooding. We were hit with just terrible flooding in 1993. Farmers couldn't plant the crop. There was a lot of economic pain. I think that is the first time that I had a chance to just watch James Lee Witt in action.

What I was most impressed about was just what we call the hands-on approach. I felt he was the opposite of somebody who was impersonal, the opposite of a "bureaucrat." By the way, there are many bureaucrats who aren't "bureaucrats." There are many people in Government who do their very best for people. I get tired of the bashing sometimes. But he was so personable and really came through for people.

Then, of course, not that long ago—what was it, a year ago, a year-and-a-half ago—we had the floods in North Dakota. Everybody remembers Grand Forks, the flooding, the fire, the cold winter weather, and East Grand Forks in Minnesota, and other communities—Ada, Warren—it was just devastating.

I just want to say, again, the bad news is that, with FEMA, you know FEMA people are going to come out because there is a real crisis. The bad news of a James Lee Witt, the Director, visiting your State, is you know he wouldn't be there and other FEMA people wouldn't be there except for some kind of disaster, except for some kind of a crisis. The good news is that always good things happen afterwards.

Once upon a time, I remember, there was all sorts of frustration about FEMA. I don't want my colleagues to forget what Mr. Witt has done. I think he is one of the best appointments the President has ever made. He has done an excellent job of making this agency so much more responsive to people in our communities, people who are facing a real crisis. What he did, and what FEMA did, to help people who had been affected by the devastating flood of the Red River, was just remarkable. It was just remarkable. I want to comment on that on the floor.

Again, this past year, we were hit with tornadoes, and again the town of Comfrey was essentially leveled to the ground. St. Peter was hit hard, Le Center—I could talk about a lot of communities. Again, James Lee Witt came.

The people in Minnesota, the people in these communities who have been faced with these crises, have tremendous appreciation for this Director—tremendous appreciation. He has gone the extra mile every time to try to push the categories of assistance as far as he can, to try to get the help to people, to try to make sure there is not unnecessary delay, to try to make sure he cuts through as much of the bureaucracy as possible. And he has done that. I just want to say to colleagues, especially to the conferees, I hope we give this agency the funding they really deserve.

The other thing I think is real important is, FEMA is now focused on this predisaster mitigation program, which I think is real important. This is another example of FEMA being in a good partnership with our local communities and with our businesses, to figure out, given what we have been faced with, how, in fact, we can do the mitigation work to prevent a lot of the damage and a lot of the pain and a lot of cost that happens afterwards. This is a very proactive Director.

My last point is, I have fallen in love with FEMA people. I don't know if I would ever do this or not, but I am tempted, if I have the skill, when I am no longer in politics or public life, to work for FEMA. It is really fascinating when you get to know people. These are people from all around the country, and they travel around, they respond to these crises, they come into your State, they live in the State—it is like a family.

It is constant responding to people—people who have been flooded out of their homes, people who don't have any clothing, people who don't know where they are going to stay, people whose businesses have been destroyed.

Of course, it is so difficult, but I am so impressed with a lot of the FEMA people and the job that they do. It is just quite amazing. You meet a former head of the State patrol of California, retired military person here, retired business person there—a whole lot of pretty fascinating people who work for FEMA who are just experts at dealing with these crisis situations.

I don't think that any of us had an opportunity to speak about FEMA as we were going through the VA-HUD appropriations bill. I wanted to speak about FEMA, and I wanted to speak about FEMA's very able Director. I am positive that I am not just speaking for myself. I am also positive that I am not just speaking for Democrats. I think there are many Republicans who would echo my sentiments about Mr. Witt and about FEMA.

AUTO WORKERS' STRIKE

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, last week I had a chance to speak about the auto workers' strike in Flint, MI. Today, this strike is about local issues, but it is of national importance. Today the presidents and the other active members of United Auto Workers locals from around the country are in Flint, MI. I wanted to one more time say that we now are more than 5 weeks into this strike.

This has affected, I think, well over 100,000 workers in the country, not just the workers of Flint. The issues are clear cut—health and safety issues, which still are very important issues at the workplace in America, the speeding up of production lines, and the sending of work or the contracting out to outside suppliers.

My own view is that GM has made a mistake with what I characterize as hardball tactics, because I think what happens is with hardball tactics—the walking away from negotiations, the threat of cutting off health care benefits of those who are out on strike, the threat of shutting down the two parts plants in Flint, MI—what it does is it undercuts the very good labor relations that actually are so critical to productivity.

On the floor of the Senate, I say to GM in particular that I think good labor relations begin with a handshake, not a 2 by 4, and I hope to see both parties back in negotiations, and the sooner the better.

What is happening in Flint, MI—again, the issues are local but the significance of it is national. What is at stake is American jobs, good jobs, living-wage jobs, jobs that pay a good wage with good fringe benefits.

As I stand today on the floor of the U.S. Senate, I want to make it clear that as a Senator, that even though I am on the floor of the Senate, I also feel like my heart and soul are with the auto workers in Flint, MI. I extend my support as a Senator from Minnesota.

There is a whole tradition to this. When I was a college teacher, I used to teach labor history, a labor politics class, and some of the most famous sitdowns took place in Flint, MI, in 1937—a very courageous, very courageous action by workers. These auto workers come out of a very rich tradition, a lot of courage by their parents and their grandparents, and I believe they are showing the same courage today.

My hope is that we will see that negotiations will resume, that there will be a fair settlement, and that the United Auto Workers will not only have done well for themselves, but, more importantly, will do well for workers around the country.

There are key issues here—health and safety issues. People who work have a right to say, "Look, we're going to work, but we're going to work under civilized working conditions." People have a right to have a decent wage.

People have a right to focus on pension and health care benefits. People have a right to be concerned about the contracting out of jobs. They have a right to be concerned about the trade agreements, as a matter of fact.

That is why the workers in Flint, MI, are on the picket line today, and that is why, as a U.S. Senator from Minnesota, I strongly support these workers who are out on the picket line.

NOMINATION OF JAMES HORMEL

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I read today in the paper—and I am not quite sure where we are headed, and I always look forward to having a chance to meet and talk with the majority leader, agree or disagree, on all issues—but I read in the paper the majority leader said he didn't think he would have time to bring up the nomination of James Hormel. That is a terrible mistake.

I have spoken on the floor. I said after the tobacco legislation, I was looking for an opportunity to offer an amendment. Frankly, on the basis of discussions I had with a lot of different people, I decided that it would be better to wait because I was hoping, if you will, that cooler heads would prevail on this matter and we would figure out a way to bring this nomination to the floor.

If it is a debate or discussion, it will be a good debate and good discussion. Too much of the climate has become too poisonous. If the majority leader is basically shutting the door on any action on the floor of the Senate—I hope he isn't; I guess that is my plea to the majority leader: I hope you have not done that—I want to find out as soon as possible. Then, I believe, it will be important for some of us to bring amendments to the floor and, basically, one way or another, have a debate and have an up-or-down vote.

Every Senator is entitled to their own opinion about whether or not James Hormel would be an able Ambassador to Luxembourg, and every Senator is entitled to a vote. I am entitled to my opinion, and I am entitled to a vote. I think the majority of us—well over 60 of us—would vote to confirm this nomination.

I cannot see anything in Mr. Hormel's record—anything in his record, anything in his record—that would disqualify him from this job. I see someone with an enormously successful background in education—that means a lot to me; education has been my life's work—a very successful business person, philanthropist, and very active in the legal profession. For the life of me, there is no reason to stop this nomination, except for the fact—and if this is the fact, let's get it out in the open—that he is gay. If that is what troubles colleagues, come out here and say it. If colleagues want to say he is gay, or if they want to say he has been too outspoken on gay causes, then let's get that out here.

Too many comments have been made in the last several months—made here, there—and I don't think that is good for the Senate. Frankly, the failure of the U.S. Senate to at least bring this nomination to the floor and have an honest discussion and an honest debate—frankly, this is less about Jim Hormel than it is about the Senate. The Senate is far more on trial than is Jim Hormel. This is not good for this institution. If this is just a case of discrimination against somebody because of their sexual orientation, we all have to look ourselves in the mirror. If not, fine, we will have the discussion, we will have the debate, and we will have the vote. But I don't think, as much as I might respect the majority leader or respect his prerogatives, necessarily his word would be the final word, at least in terms of a discussion and a debate. My hope is, we can figure out a way of bringing Mr. Hormel's nomination to the floor and that there will be a vote.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. WELLSTONE. Finally, Mr. President, seeing no other colleague on the floor, I want to talk about this more in detail and in depth when we have the Commerce-State-Justice appropriations bill before us, which I think will be in the next day or so. I am working on an amendment—I hope it can be ready—that actually evolves from a piece of legislation I have been working on for some time dealing with mental health in children.

I have been very lucky to have done a lot of the mental health work with Senator DOMENICI from New Mexico, my Republican colleague. He has certainly been more of the leader than I have, but I have been honored to work with him.

Mr. President, I went on a visit—I will talk about this in more detail, in more depth later—to Lula, LA, about 2 weeks ago as a Senator. I think it was some of the best work I have done as a Senator outside of Minnesota—the best work is in Minnesota. I wanted to go there because I have read some Justice Department reports about the need for real dramatic improvement in the conditions affecting these children.

I see pages here. This is a corrections center, and the kids that are here in the center range in age from 11 to about 18. A lot of the kids I talked to were 14, 15. I did talk to several 11-year-olds as well. I went down there determined—I talked to both of my colleagues from Louisiana, not to sort of say, well, how terrible, Louisiana; only in Louisiana. I do not believe that for a moment. I think we can do a lot better.

My focus had to do with mental health and children. The estimates now made by the Justice Department—there was a pretty powerful front-page story in the New York Times that was written last week that I will get in the RECORD when I offer this amendment.

But the fact of the matter is, the estimates are that about 25 percent of the kids here struggle with mental problems. Many of them actually never committed a crime. I mean, they would be picked up, they would run away from home, be out in the street. A very small percentage committed a violent crime; I guess probably less than 10 percent, closer to 5 percent. I will talk about that in a moment.

But what happens is that these facilities—and this is certainly what happened in Lula—become a dumping ground with kids struggling with mental illness. They should not be there in the first place. To compound the problem, they are there, but with no treatment. And to compound that problem, it becomes pretty brutal with them. They should not be there.

I went to Lula—and, again, I am going to be very careful as not to speak with that much emotion because there is plenty to be emotional about, but to just give a report on the floor of the Senate. I will focus on this again in more detail with the amendment so my colleagues know what the amendment is about.

In the administrative building there were a lot of people from Louisiana that were there, a lot of officials, which was fine. I met the new warden, whom I believe is trying to make changes. He just got there, so it would be unfair to pin any of this on him.

I wanted to go to the solitary confinement cells because I also heard kids were locked up in solitary confinement as many as 23 hours a day for as long as 6 or 7 weeks. I wanted to know which kids. I wanted to know, What does a kid do to be put in solitary confinement like this? What is the criteria you use? I wanted to know more about that.

Initially, we negotiated, and the idea was I would get there, but first I would start off with kids who were eating lunch. I went in, and it was interesting. There were kids eating lunch. I also say, since I think race is still a reality in America, my guess is over 80 percent of the kids of about 500-plus kids were African American. I do not know what the population is in Louisiana—certainly nowhere close to 80 percent.

Kids were eating, and I went up to some kids who were eating, and I just said, "How are you doing?" This one young guy said to me, "Not that good." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, you see this food?" By this time lots of officials were with me. He said, "See this food?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "We never eat this food. We never have a meal like this. This is just because you're here."

He said, "The table—smell the paint. This was just painted. These tables don't look like this." He said, "These clothes I have on,"—I am just reporting what he said to me—he said, "These clothes I have on, they just gave us this stuff last night. These aren't the clothes we usually wear. It's hot. There's no air conditioning. You